

## **The Black Sox Scandal**

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How much do you really know about the greatest fix in baseball history? Early baseball was much different than it is today. The game itself has changed significantly, but the effects of gambling are still felt today.

Baseball's first professional baseball team was the Cincinnati Red Stockings. They played their first game in 1869. The first World Series game was played in 1903, and the battle of the best teams from both leagues, quickly became of great interest to the American people. The attendance at professional baseball games kept rising, especially after World War 1. The 1919 season saw many attendance records broken and the World Series was greatly anticipated. It became the premier sporting event.

At the time, baseball was tied to gambling. The scandal could not have come at a worse time. Post-war depression was starting. There was public disillusionment about the economy, and racial tensions were growing. Americans were in need of their good old pastime, baseball. There were three gamblers that stand out above the rest in the Black Sox Scandal. They are William Thomas (Sleepy Bill), and Bill Burns, and Billy Maharg. They approached two White Sox players, pitcher Ed Cicotte and first baseman Arnold Gandil.

The gamblers knew it would take more than just two players to fix the series. A lot of money was at stake. They soon added six more to the plot: pitcher Lefty Williams, centerfielder Happy Flesch, shortstop Swede Risberg, third baseman Buck Weaver, utility man Fred McMullin, and left fielder Joe Jackson. Gamblers put up half of a million on the Reds to take the series. Yet they only paid the players \$100,000 to split among themselves.

Many people thought that the Chicago White Sox were the best baseball team of all time. The team contained many of the same players it had when they won the 1917 World Series; yet the White Sox salaries were among the lowest in the sport, just \$85,000 for the entire team. The White Sox main players were Eddie Cicotte, Lefty Williams, Buck Weaver, Happy Flesch, and the man who made it all work - Joe Jackson. Once Washington pitcher, Walter Johnson said, "I consider Joe Jackson the greatest natural ballplayer I've ever seen."

On September 24, 1919, the White Sox clinched the pennant. The White Sox were to play the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series who were managed by Pat Moran. The Reds were good, but not a sensational team.

The Sox were a 3-1 favorite to win the series and the American League had won 8 of the last 9 World Series. A few days before the series, huge amounts of money came from bettors who favored Cincinnati.

Gandil approached Joe Jackson the most valuable player to the Sox, and said, "Seven of us have gotten together to frame up the World Series. You'll get \$10,000 if you help us out." Jackson said, "No I want no part of that."

The first games of the series was played at Cincinnati's Redland Field on October 1, 1919 before 30,511 fans. Christy Mathewson, a great major league pitcher, kept score and circled questionable plays. Ed Cicotte beamed the first batter of the game, which was the sign that the fix was on. The White Sox lost 9 to 1 and Joe Jackson went hitless. The Sox also lost game two with a score of 4 to 2 and Lefty Williams on the mound. In game three, Dickie Kerr threw a three hit shutout and led the Sox to a 3-0 win, but the Sox lost the next game. October 5, 1919, game 5 got rained out. The Reds later won Game five, 5-0. The Sox won game six, 5 to 4. In game seven the Sox won, 4 to 1. Game 8, The Reds won 10 to 1; the final out was made by Joe Jackson grounding out to second base. In the series Jackson batted .375; .71 points higher than in his last World Series, when he had 12 hits for a new record for a World Series, and hit the only homerun in the entire World Series. He also did not make an error.

The night after the last game in 1919, Lefty Williams gave Jackson a dirty envelope with \$5,000 in it. Jackson refused to take it, saying he did not want the money. Williams threw the money on the ground and left. Joe Jackson went to see Mr. Comiskey with the money in his pocket the next day. Jackson knocked on owner Charles Comiskey's door and Harry Grabiner the quasi-general manager and secretary to Comiskey came to the door. Jackson showed Grabiner the \$5,000, telling him how he had got it. Grabiner told him to go home and he'd write if anything further happened.

Now that the series was over, charges of a fix were now out in the open and the controversy exploded. Although Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the first commissioner of baseball, suspended each of the players, he promised them reinstatement if they were found not guilty. However, he still banned them all for life even though they were cleared of all criminal charges. He later went on to say this, "regardless of the verdict of the juries," he said, "no player that throws a ball game....will ever play professional baseball." Seven of the eight

Black Sox confessed to throwing the series, but one player seemed to be relatively innocent and that was Shoeless Joe Jackson. Shoeless Joe had a lifetime batting average of .354, third all time, and was one of the best hitters to ever play the game of baseball. Jackson is the only player to hit over .400 and not win a batting title. Joe Jackson had not only told Comiskey of the fix but also asked to be benched during the series. Therefore he wasn't a part of the scandal.

The Black Sox Scandal was one of the biggest and darkest events in baseball history. As Ed R. Hughes of the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, "Baseball means something to this country and the game itself is bigger than the crooks who have tried to ruin it." It made the American people temporarily lose faith in the game they loved.

There is still one big question left by the scandal; "Should Shoeless Joe be admitted to the Hall of Fame?" This question has been the subject of much controversy. Shoeless Joe was not angry and accordingly he left us with these words: "I am going to meet the greatest umpire of all - and He knows I'm innocent." [From Eliot Asinof (1963), *Eight Men Out*; "Eight Men Out," Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1988; Robert C. Cottrell, *Blackball, the Black Sox and the Babe*; Harvey Frommer, *Shoeless Joe and Ragtime Baseball*; Montgomery college, Maryland, "1919 Black Sox Scandal," [www.mc.cc.md.us/Departments/hpolsrv/bloacksox](http://www.mc.cc.md.us/Departments/hpolsrv/bloacksox). (Oct. 22, 2003).]